encouraging horse. She almost expected him to make a cluck at the back of his throat. She felt the tension of his muscles, as if he were doing his best to help the engine on. They slowed—they almost stopped. No, now they were on the crest of the hill. She had done it on top!

"Well done!" she exclaimed. He said nothing; but he was very proud, she knew.

"We couldn't have done that on the old car," she said.

"Ah, but it wasn't her fault!" said Cole.

He was a very humane man, she reflected; the kind of man she liked. She relaxed now, for the road was clear ahead, she could look about her.

"So that house is let at last." she said as they passed a low grey stone house behind a gate. Ill-kept bushes grew right up to the front door. For fifty years an eccentric lady had lived there, alone with peacocks and bloodhounds; issuing out only at dusk and heavily veiled. But the postman was now delivering letters. A solicitor from York had taken it, Cole said, a man of the name of Rudge. They sped on. Now the woods were on their right hand and the air came singing through them. It sounded like the sea, Kitty thought, looking as they passed, down a dark green drive patched with yellow sunlight. They sped on. Heaps of ruddy brown leaves lay by the roadside staining the puddles red.

"It's been raining?" she said. He nodded. Spring comes very slowly, she thought; but when it came, it was real: it was spring truly. They came out on the high ridge with the woods beneath, and there, in a clearing among the trees, there was a green grey roof; a clock tower; and the spark of a glasshouse. It was the first sight of the Castle. She always looked out for it and greeted it as if she were raising her hand to a friend. Now they were on their own land. Gate-posts were branded with their initials; their arms hung above the signboard of the inns; their crest was mounted over cottage doors. Cole looked at the clock.

"We shall do it under the three-quarters, m'lady," he said. He was still cautious; but there was triumph in his voice. The old car had never done it under the hour. The needle leapt again.

Too fast, too fast! Kitty said to herself. But she liked the rush of the wind in her face. Now they reached the Lodge gate; Mrs Preedy was holding it open with a white-haired child on her arm. Kitty nodded as they rushed past. They swept round through the park. The deer looked up and hopped lightly away through the ferns. There ahead of them was the old grey house.

"Two minutes under the three-quarters, m'lady," said Cole as they swept in a circle and drew up at the door. Kitty stood for a moment looking at the car. She laid her hand on the bonnet. It was hot. She gave it a little pat.

"She did it beautifully, Cole," she said. "I'll tell his Lordship."

"It's only the starting she's slow at," said Cole, much gratified.

Kitty took her bag and carried it in. Nobody was about; they had arrived earlier than was expected. The house was shut up until the summer. She crossed the great stone-flagged hall, with the armour and the busts, and went into the morning room where breakfast

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that money—she saw Rigby Cottages again and the sunflower with a crack down the middle, I could have . . . But what's the use of thinking? she thought. The steam rose in a cloud; she turned on the cold tap. She waited for a moment for the water to be cool enough to get into. She was stark naked; the window had no blind. She stood looking at the dappled iridescence of the moon-lit sky, which seemed to make her bathroom whiter, cleaner, more dazzling in its purity than ever; and then she stepped in.

"If that is the river," Eleanor said, pausing outside the station, "then Westminster must be over there."

It was a cold night and very dark. The further side of the street was almost invisible, because the lamps were shrouded in blue. It must be this way, she thought walking on, but with some hesitation; for though she knew this part of London very well, it was extraordinary what a difference darkness made. All the buildings, looming up without lights, looked vast and unfamiliar. Great spokes of light like the sails of a windmill moved across the sky; stopped; pondered; examined a fleecy patch of sky, and then swept on again. But they made the streets look more unfamiliar than ever.

She was dining with Renny and Maggie, and they lived in one of the rather obscure little streets under the shadow of the Abbey. ~~It was always difficult to distinguish one from the other, even when the lamps were lit.~~ She stopped again to take her bearings; there was the Abbey anyhow, but which street was this? She flashed her little pocket-torch onto a name on the wall. ~~The huge bulk of the Abbey always~~ seemed to brood over the streets here, making them even smaller and darker. ~~Again~~ she flashed her torch. ~~Another name~~ shone out. She peered her way along the street, turning her lamp onto door after door. Here she lit up a brick wall; here a dark-green tuft of ivy. ~~All the windows were closely curtained.~~ But at last the number she was looking for—number thirty—shone out. She knocked and rang at the same moment, for the darkness seemed to muffle sound as well as light. Silence seemed to weigh upon her as she stood waiting; there were very few people about.

The door opened. ~~She felt as if a weight were lifted, partly because~~ a man's voice said "Come in!" ~~partly because the sense of being in an enclosed place~~ was so

The friend of the son of the wine merchant, Eleanor repeated, as she took her glass. Of course he was French; the son of the wine merchant, with his big nose and dark eyes; but he had been educated in England. He was silent, like an Englishman; reserved; but the other man, she thought as she sipped, he's a talker, with those lips, and the eyes—which were full and brown. Was he Russian? Italian? What is he? she wondered as she drank: But I like him. The wine seemed to caress a knob in her spine.

~~"Maggie's coming," Renny said. He paused~~. "She's ~~getting dinner." He paused again~~. "If the Allies," ~~he~~ began; he disregarded Eleanor; he seemed to go on with what he was thinking, "at the end of the Napoleonic Wars——" But here Maggie came in.

"Good-evening, Magdalena," said Nicholas, bowing profoundly in his foreign way.

"Good-evening, Eleanor," she said, disregarding Nicholas's bow as if she knew him very well. "~~We~~ dine in the basement—if you don't mind?"

"No, of course I don't mind," said Eleanor.

"Then I'll show you the way," said Maggie, turning, "—because the soup's on the table."

"But Magdalena——" Nicholas interposed.

She did not answer. She was already showing Eleanor down the steep kitchen stairs.

"We've no servants," she was explaining, "—take care of that step—so we dine down here."

She led the way into a small room next the kitchen where dinner was laid.

~~"It saves carrying plates," she added.~~

"But Magdalena . . ." Nicholas repeated as they stood in the little, low-ceilinged room, "Sara said, 'We shall meet tomorrow night at Maggie's,' and she is no there." He stood looking round.

"She'll come in time," said Maggie. She lifted the lid of the soup tureen and began ladling out soup. The others sat down; but Nicholas remained standing.

"I shall ring her up," he said, and left the room.

"Isn't it much nicer," said Eleanor, taking her plate

and looking round her, "having no servants?"

"We have a woman in to do the washing-up," said Maggie.

"And we are extremely dirty," said Renny. He took up a fork and examined it between the prongs. "No, this fork, as it happens, is clean," he said, and put it down.

Nicholas came back into the room again. He looked perturbed.

Why is he so much interested in Sara? Eleanor wondered. Are they engaged?

"She is not there," he said to Maggie. "I rang her up but I could get no answer."

"Probably she's on her way," said Maggie. "Or she may have forgotten and gone somewhere else."

She handed him his soup. But he sat looking at his plate without moving. Wrinkles had come on his forehead. He made no attempt to disguise his anxiety. He must be engaged to Sara, Eleanor thought; she liked him now that he was silent, and yet he puzzled her. He began gulping his soup in great mouthfuls, making a noise, for he was entirely without self-consciousness. He made no pretence of listening as they talked about servants.

"There!" he exclaimed, interrupting Eleanor, who was saying something about Crosby. She stopped but she could hear nothing. But as she listened she heard somebody coming rather haltingly down the kitchen stairs.

"Here she is!" said Nicholas. He put down his spoon and sat looking at the door. The door opened and Sara came in. She looked pinched with the cold; her cheeks were white here, and red there; and she blinked a little as if the light dazzled her. She hardly smiled at them, as if she were numb still from her walk through the blue shrouded streets. But she gave her hand to Nicholas as she sat down beside him and he kissed it.

"Yes. We are dirty," said Maggie, looking at her sister. She had not changed; she was in her day clothes. "And I'm in rags," she added, for a loop of gold thread hung down from her sleeve, as she handed Sara her soup.

"I was thinking how beautiful it is," Eleanor said, looking at her dress. It was silver with gold threads in it, but rather worn. Her eyes had been rested on it unconsciously with pleasure. "Where did you get it?" she asked.

"In Constantinople, from a Turk," said Maggie.

"A turbaned and fantastic Turk," Sara murmured, stroking the sleeve as she took her plate. "And that's pretty," she added, touching the golden rabbit, whose head made a boss on the soup tureen, "the golden rabbit." She still seemed dazed.

"Yes, and the plates too," said Eleanor, looking at the purple birds of Paradise on her plate. "Don't I remember them?" she asked.

"In a cabinet in the drawing-room at home," said Maggie. "But it seemed silly—keeping them in a cabinet," she added.

"We break one every week," said Renny.

"They'll last out the war," said Maggie.

Eleanor observed a curious mask-like expression fall over Renny's face as she said "the war." Like all the French, she thought, he feels passionately for his country. He was silent. He did something: he was in some works; she could not remember what.

FIRST PROOF

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"But why were you so late?" said Nicholas, turning to Sara. He spoke gently and reproachfully, rather as if she were a child. He had let her finish her soup, Eleanor observed, before he spoke to her. Now he was helping her to wine. Take care, Eleanor felt inclined to warn her; you're still dazed from the cold; if you drink that it'll go to your head. She was feeling slightly light-

him—" is a Pole. And your mother, Maggie——"

She was looking at a chair in the corner with gilt claws which she connected somehow with Eugénie.

"She was partly Irish and partly Spanish," said Maggie.

"A mix-up, a mix-up," Nicholas repeated, taking her words just as he had repeated "that fit," "that fit" before dinner. Then he looked at his hands and then, as Eleanor knew he would, began:

"And so for what reason do we go to war?"

It was impossible, Eleanor supposed, to keep off the war; but she wished he would, because Renny minded it so much. But he was off; he is one of those voluble foreigners, she thought, half listening, with a theory about everything. Governments want war; people don't. . . . Still, even if he talked nonsense, she thought, watching him touching his fingers, there was something she liked about him; something genial; if effusive.

"So it's for private people like ourselves . . ." she said, filling in a pause; for he had stopped and was searching in his pockets.

"I have brought my own sugar and butter, Maggie," he said, producing a little parcel.

"Oh, that reminds me," said Eleanor. She ought to have remembered that she had brought her butter before. She opened her bag and produced a greasy little parcel. "That's mine," she said, putting her butter on the common plate.

"And that damned humbug," said Sara, "your nephew North, Eleanor, your nephew North, ate all my butter and all my sugar."

"So you must sponge on us," said Renny, pushing the butter towards her.

"So I must sponge on you," she said, helping herself.

"You should have had more self-control, Sara," said Nicholas. He treated her rather as if she were a child, Eleanor thought—a child for whom he was responsible. Were they engaged, or were they not engaged? she wondered. She looked at Sara's hands; there was no ring on them.

"So I should," said Sara, leaning back in her chair. "That's true. But he gave his bridle reins a shake," she murmured, "and said, 'Adieu for evermore, adieu for evermore.' " She sighed, and then she drank again.

"You shall have no more to drink," said Nicholas. He moved away the bottle. That's right, Eleanor thought; wine goes to one's head when one's tired.

"She saw herself," he said, turning to Eleanor, "on top of a tower, waving a white handkerchief to a knight in armour."

"And the moon was rising over a dark moor," Sara murmured, and stretched out her hand and took up the pepper-pot. The pepper-pot's a dark moor, Eleanor

leaning towards her. "She was"—all her good qualities seemed to come before her, not her bad ones—"so unlike other people," she added. "Everything about her," she said, remembering Eugénie.

"She used to dance," said Sara. She drummed on the table. "When I was young," she hummed, "I used to dance. All men loved me when I was young and used to dance. How did it go, Maggie? Roses and syringas hung, when I was young—when I was young. . . ." She tapped on the table.

"It was a waltz," said Maggie. They seemed to be remembering the same thing: "When I came up to your room after a party."

"A waltz?" said Eleanor. "Yes, we used to dance them."

Renny and Nicholas were arguing about something rather hotly. She turned to Maggie and Sara."

"There was a waltz we used to dance," she said. "How did it go?"

She tried to remember. She began to hum. Sara tapped the rhythm of a waltz on the table. Suddenly a long-drawn hollow sound wailed out.

"No, no!" Eleanor protested, as if somebody had given her the wrong note. The sound wailed again.

"A fog-horn," she said, "on the river?" But as she said it she knew what it was. They were all silent. The siren wailed again.

"Those damned Germans," said Renny. He put down his knife and fork. He spoke with an exaggerated gesture of boredom. Then Maggie got up and said something to her husband.

"The Germans," said Eleanor. She felt an absurd feeling of personal resentment; as if some dull bore had interrupted an interesting conversation. The colours began to fade. It was like a light going out; she was looking at the red chair. It seemed to lose its radiance.

"As you like," said Renny to Maggie; "but it won't make any difference, if a bomb falls on this house . . ." But she had left the room.

"Maggie likes to bring the children down into the kitchen," he said, rather apologetically. "I'd better help her." He followed her out of the room. The others sat silent round the table. The sirens had stopped

Westminster, Eleanor remembered, had been silenced. But Nicholas was holding out his cigarette-case.

"Thanks so much," she said, taking one. "That's just what I wanted."

"Why do you smoke those nasty things?" said Renny. "Try this." He offered her a cigar.

"But shan't I be sick?" she said. She placed it gingerly in her mouth.

"It's a mild one," he said. She puffed, and a little trickle of smoke oozed out. Nobody seemed to wish to talk. Maggie took up the poker and struck the wood blocks. The sparks went volleying up the chimney in a shower of gold eyes.

"How that makes me——" Eleanor began. She stopped.

"Yes?" said Nicholas.

"Think of my childhood," she added. She puffed again at her cigar. "The firemen, flying up the chimney."

She was thinking of Morris and herself, and old Pippy—but nobody would know what she meant.

They were silent. She puffed at her cigar.

"Take it easily; take it quietly," said Renny. He blew a perfect ring through his nose. The heavy circle hung for a moment in the air.

"How do you do it?" she asked. He did it again. One ring went through the other, and the two rings, melting and mixing, wobbled away in long curves of smoke. Eleanor hollowed her mouth and blew too; but without success. As she tried again, a clear flute-like note rang out in the street below.

"What's that?" said Maggie. She started. She looked at the window; she seemed about to rise.

"It's all right," said Renny, putting his hand out to stop her. "The bugles," he added. "The All Clear."

The bugles blew again below the window. Then they heard them further down the street; and then again further away down the next street. The sound faded away. Almost directly the hooting of cars began, and the rushing of wheels, as if the traffic had been released, and the usual night life of London had begun again.

"Well, that's over," said Maggie. She lay back in her chair. She looked very tired for a moment; then she pulled a basket towards her and began sorting out stockings and socks.

"That's a mercy," said Eleanor. "I'm glad I'm alive," she added. She felt as if she were making a confession. For other people of course, as Renny had said, were being killed. He was leaning on his elbow smoking his cigar and looking into the fire.

"Is that wrong, Renny?" she asked, for she respected him.

"I don't lay down laws for other people," he said.

"Renny, Renny, Renny," said Nicholas, as if he were expostulating with a naughty child.

"I have spent the evening sitting in a coal-cellar while other people try to kill themselves above my head," he said. He continued to smoke his cigar and to gaze into the fire.

"But, Renny——" Eleanor began. He reached out without paying her any attention, and picked up a newspaper.

"He poisons himself," said Nicholas, pointing to the floor littered with newspapers. Renny went on reading.

The rushing of wheels and the hooting of motor

horns went on, but they had now become usual and they did not notice them any more. As Renny was reading and Maggie was darning, there was silence in the room. It seemed to be unnecessary for anybody to talk. I wonder what we are thinking, Eleanor thought as she puffed at her cigar. The presence of the others seemed to press upon her though nobody spoke. Everybody seemed to give off some influence which affected her now with liking, now with disliking. All the evening she had been adding this to that, and then taking it away and adding something different. But beneath it, now that they were silent, was something that went beneath the surface feelings of liking, of disliking. A common feeling; a nameless feeling. . . .

"What are you thinking, Eleanor?" Nicholas interrupted her.

"Oh, nothing——" she said, looking up. "It's difficult to say what one thinks, isn't it?" she added. . . . "Will there ever be a time," she said, "when we shall be able to say—to say what we think?" she asked him. She felt at a loss for words.

"Yes, yes," he said.

She smiled; she liked his optimism.

"D'you think we're going to improve?" she asked.

"Yes, yes," he said, nodding his head.

He spoke quietly as if he did not wish to rouse Renny who was reading, or Maggie who was darning. They seemed to be talking privately together.

"It is only a question of learning," he said. "The soul——" he began. But he stopped. He drew closer to Eleanor.

"Yes—the soul?" she prompted him, as if to assure him that the word, though seldom used, was a good one.

"It's a question," he said, bending towards her so that they seemed to be in a little shelter together, "how to educate the soul."

"The soul," she said, wondering what he meant by it.

"The soul—the whole being." He explained; he hollowed his hands. "It wishes to rush; to expand; always adventuring; always forming new"—he hesitated—"combinations?"

"Yes—combinations. That's all right," she confirmed him.

"Whereas now," he continued, "this is how we live."

She looked at him. He had drawn himself together in his chair; he had put his feet together neatly; he looked like an old lady who is afraid of mice.

"This is how we live, screwed up into one tight little hard little——"

"Knot?" she suggested.

"Yes, knot," he replied. "Each in his own separate cubicle; each with his own little cross or holy book; each with his fire; with his wife——"

"Darning socks," said Maggie. She laid the sock on her knee and smoothed out the darn.

"What are you talking about?" said Renny.

He threw away his paper.

"The soul," said Maggie.

"Oh, the soul," said Renny. He stretched out and took up another paper.

"He poisons himself, he poisons himself," said Nicholas, shaking his head. But Renny went on reading.

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"Well?" said Eleanor, turning to Nicholas privately again.

"Well?" he asked.

"You were saying . . ." she began. "How we can . . . improve ourselves . . . live more . . ." she dropped her voice; she was afraid of using words that sounded priggish, ". . . live more naturally . . . better. How can we?"

"Oh, we can, we can," he nodded. He held his hands hollowed again, with the cigarette still burning in them. He seemed to have it all ready, she thought, some theory; some simple solution. Perhaps if he did talk he would go on talking for ever, she thought. But she wanted him to go on talking. She felt not only a new space of time, but new powers; something unknown in her.

"We can improve in time, you think?" she said in a low voice.

"Of course, of course," he said in a low voice too, as if they were talking in the presence of sleepers.

"But how long will it take?" she murmured. She puffed at her cigar so that the smoke might obscure her face.

"Five hundred years? A thousand?" he said, shrugging his shoulders. A rush of disappointment went through her. It was absurd, but she had felt that it was within his power to bring about an instant miracle, and now there was to be no miracle, not for a thousand years.

"Then we shall never know what it's like," she said. She could not prevent her disappointment sounding in her voice, absurd though it was.

"Not in the body," he said. "No."

"But I don't believe in the life after death," she murmured. "Do you"—she hesitated; she had not yet called him by his name—"Nicholas?" she said, tentatively.

He shook his head. "But I believe," he added, drawing his chair an inch or two towards her, "in our life here on earth."

"But if I'm not conscious of my life here on earth?" she murmured.

"My life, no; our life, yes," he said.

"That's a quotation, isn't it?" she asked. She seemed to remember reading it somewhere; and he spoke as if he were quoting.

"A quotation?—is it?" he said, throwing away his cigarette. "Very possibly. There is no such thing as an original saying. We all think the same things."

"Only we don't say them," she said. That was what they had said when she came in. They had got back to the same point again. She wanted now to go on; she wanted to ask him all sorts of things; she wanted to ask him—— But Maggie put down her sock and turned round. "Yes, that's all very well," she said. She looked at Nicholas as if she were referring to something he had said—something that had stuck in her mind. "But if we have to earn our livings, Nicholas?"

Eleanor felt a keen shock of disappointment. Somebody always broke in and interrupted, she thought, just as one was beginning to understand. Renny threw down his paper.

"It's all damned rot," he said. Whether he referred to the paper, or whether he had overheard what they had been saying, Eleanor did not know. But it was impossible to go on talking privately.

"Why d'you buy them, then?" she said, pointing to the papers.

"To light the fires," said Renny.

Maggie laughed. She stopped talking to Nicholas. She threw the sock she had mended on the table. "There!" she said. "Mended."

She lay back in the chair and passed her hands over her eyes as if she were relieved to have done with her darning. They were all silent, looking at the fire.

"Where d'you get such good wood?" Eleanor asked. Her own fire had been reduced in the past months; when she lit it there was only a feeble trickle of gas.

"I met a man with a barrow in the Brompton Road and made eyes at him," said Maggie. She raised her eyes and let them fall again. Renny made a sound something between pish and pshaw. But you must let us think of something else, Eleanor thought, looking at him.

Again they were silent. Again Eleanor felt words coming together in her mind, as if when people talked they threw words into your mind, and then after a time they floated together and made sentences. She was tired; it took her some time to make words come together. But if Maggie said We have to earn our livings, and Renny said It's all such rot; what he meant was—she glanced at him—for some reason he was laughing now; but what he had meant was: Here am I earning my living; how, then, can I develop the soul—— She looked at Nicholas as if she wanted him to confirm what she was thinking. But he was talking to Sara. Eleanor had forgotten her. She was leaning forward in her chair, propping her head on her hands with a book on her knee. That was the way one read when one was a child, Eleanor thought.

"And what have you been thinking all this time?" Nicholas was saying to her. "Or have you been asleep?" he added.

She put her hand between the pages and looked up. "I heard what you were saying," she said. She shut her book and yawned.

"What were we saying?" he asked.

"The soul flying upwards—like sparks up the chimney," she said, waving her hand.

The sparks were flying up the chimney. Renny was poking the fire.

"That wasn't such a bad shot," said Nicholas. Eleanor observed again the queerness of his attitude towards her; it was protective, and very intimate; and yet she felt that it lacked—what was it? She looked at Renny and Maggie—some kind of warmth, she thought.

"Because people always say the same thing," said Sara. She roused herself and sat up. "There's Maggie," she said. "She says nothing; there's Renny"—she pointed at him. "He says, 'What damned rot!' Eleanor says, 'That's just what I was thinking'; and Nicholas—Nicholas," she repeated, tapping him on the knee and laughing, "who ought to be in prison, says, 'Oh, my dear friends, let us improve the soul!' "

"Ought he to be in prison?" said Eleanor. Was he a Conscientious Objector? she wondered, looking at him.

Marked proof

For a moment a sharp shiver of repugnance passed across Eleanor as if a knife had sliced her skin. But it touched nothing of any importance, she realised; and it explained a great deal. Nicholas was watching her.

"Does that," he said, hesitating a little, "make you dislike me, Eleanor?"

"Not in the least!" she said spontaneously. She had felt many things about him in the course of the evening; she had liked him for this; disliked him for that; but now they all swam together; and liking was uppermost.

"Not in the least," she repeated.

"The one thing I respect him for," said Sara, "they put him in prison for."

"It's all such rot!" Renny exclaimed.

"Didn't I say so?" said Sara. "It's all such rot, it's all such rot." She laughed, imitating her brother-in-law. Then she yawned.

"I shall go to bed," she said. "I'm sleepy."

Eleanor looked at her watch. It was late—later than she expected. She got up, and parted the curtains. The cold winter's night was almost black; it was like looking out into a hollow dark-blue stone. Frosty little stars twinkled over the houses, but they were merely black shapes.

"I'll get you a cab," said Renny, as she took up her coat.

"No, I'll walk," she said. "I like walking in London."

"And we will come with you," said Nicholas. "Come, Sara; here is your hat; here is your bag." He gave her her bag.

"Are you sure you have your latchkey in it?" he asked. She spilt the contents of her bag onto her lap as she sat on the arm of the chair. "Half a crown; two shillings; seven coppers and a threepenny-bit," she counted. "But where's my latchkey? Have I a latchkey, or——"

"Here it is on the floor," said Nicholas, picking up the key and giving it her. "So come," he said.

"But I don't want to come," said Sara. "I want to stay; I want to talk; I want to sing. I want to raise a hymn of praise. . . ."

"Come, "said Nicholas. "Come." He took her by the shoulder and pushed her out of the room.

Eleanor went up to say good-night to Maggie. "I should like to stay too," she said. "There's so much I want to say——"

"But I want to go to bed—I want to go to bed," said Renny.

"So you shall," said Maggie, as if he were a child. She picked up the newspapers and began tidying the room.

"Don't bother to come down," Eleanor protested as Renny opened the door for her. But he insisted. He was very tired; he was longing to go to bed, she felt. But all the same he was very polite. Very polite and very rude, she felt. Contradictory somehow. The sort of man, she thought as she went downstairs with him, who feels many different things; and all passionately;

by the perambulator.

"Educating themselves," he said.

"Good-night," she said, smiling as she shook hands.

"Good-night," he said, and shut the door.

That is the man, she said to herself with a sudden rush of conviction as she came out into the air, that I should like to have married. She had never felt that for any of the men who had wanted to marry her; but this was the feeling that she might have felt. And he's twenty years younger than I am, she thought as she walked up the street, and married to my cousin. For a moment she resented the passage of time and the accidents of life which had swept her away from—away from all that she thought with a sudden sense of the evening as a whole. For as she walked behind the others up the dark little street, some things sank; others rose; and it became clear to her that all the evening she had felt one constant and continuous feeling—that it was a happy marriage. Which is rare, she said, very rare.

She looked up. A broad fan of light, like the sail of a windmill, was sweeping across the sky. It paused as if it pondered something; it lit up a fleecy little patch of sky. Then it swept on again; and as it moved it seemed to her to take what she was feeling and to express it, broadly and simply, in a way that was a relief to her feelings. Then she suddenly remembered.

"I'd forgotten the raid!" she exclaimed. She stopped for a moment. Nicholas and Sara stopped too. They were in Victoria Street. There were no signs of anything unusual. The street was perhaps emptier and darker than usual. But there were people walking along the pavement; they emerged for a moment under a lamp and then vanished into the darkness again.

"Will the omnibuses be running as usual?" Eleanor asked.

They looked round them.

"Yes; there is an omnibus," said Nicholas as one of the great forms loomed up through the darkness. Its lights were shrouded with blue paint.

"Then I shall wait here," said Eleanor. They all waited at the corner for a moment.

"Then I shall go," said Sara abruptly. "Good-night!" She waved her hand and walked away. Eleanor took it for granted that Nicholas would go with her. She held out her hand to him.

"I shall wait here," she repeated.

But he did not move. Sara was already vanishing. She did not look after her. Eleanor felt that some inexplicable gloom had come over him. Was he angry? Was he unhappy? She did not know. But here her omnibus stopped beside them. She could think of nothing to say as she took his hand. As the omnibus moved, she looked back and saw him still standing on the pavement. He still had his hat in his hand. He looked tall, impressive and solitary standing there alone. Then she lost sight of him.

The omnibus was almost empty. What passengers there were sat huddled up, silent, shrouded in the blue light, which made them look cadaverous, unreal and spectral. But there was one old man in the corner opposite her who was eating something out of a paper bag. She could not help wondering what he was eating

"Dirty brute," Crosby muttered as she hobbled along the asphalt path. Her legs were paining her. It was not actually raining, but the great open space was full of mist; and there was nobody near, so that she could talk aloud.

"Dirty brute," she muttered again. She had got into the habit of talking aloud. There was nobody in sight; the end of the path was lost in mist. It was very silent. Only the rooks gathered on the tree-tops now and then let fall a queer little croak, and a leaf, spotted with black, fell to the ground. Her face twitched as she walked, as if her muscles had got into the habit of protesting, involuntarily, against the spites and obstacles that tormented her. She had aged greatly during the past four years. She looked so small and hunched that it seemed doubtful if she could make her way across the wide open space that lay in front of her, shrouded in white mist. But she had to go to the High Street to do her shopping.

"The dirty brute," she muttered again. She had had some words that morning with Mrs Burt about the Count's bath. He spat in it, and Mrs Burt had told her to clean it.

"Count indeed—he's no more Count than you are," she continued. She was now talking to Mrs Burt. "I'm quite willing to oblige you," she went on. Even out here, in the mist, where she was free to say what she liked, she adopted a conciliatory tone, because she knew that they wanted to get rid of her. She gesticulated with the hand that was not carrying the bag as she told Louisa that she was quite ready to oblige her. She hobbled on. "And I shouldn't mind going either," she added bitterly, but this was spoken to herself only. It was no pleasure to her to live in the house any more; but there was nowhere else for her to go, as the Burts knew very well.

"And I'm quite ready to oblige you," she added aloud, as indeed she had said to Louisa herself. But the truth was that she was no longer able to work as she had done. Her legs pained her. It took all the strength out of her to do her own shopping, let alone to clean the bath. But it was all take-it-or-leave-it now. In the old days she would have sent the whole lot packing.

"Drabs . . . hussies," she said. She was now addressing the red-haired servant girl who had flung out of the house yesterday without warning. She could easily get another job. It didn't matter to her. So it was left to Crosby to clean the Count's bath.

"Dirty brute, dirty brute," she repeated; her pale-blue eyes glared impotently. She saw once more the blob of spittle that the Count had left on the side of his bath—the Belgian who called himself a Count. "I've been used to work for gentlefolk, not for dirty foreigners like you," she told him as she hobbled.

"How interesting!" Peggy exclaimed. "Do go on, Nell." She felt that she was being shown a picture.

"But what's there interesting about it?" Eleanor asked. "Your lives are much more interesting than mine was."

Then she made a quick movement as if to attract the driver's attention. "Don't Maggie and Renny live down there?" she waved her hand out of the window. "Can't we stop him? Shan't we just go in and ask them —give them a lift?"

"Ask them?" said Peggy. It seemed to her a wild-goose idea—interrupting them when, very likely, they did not want to go to the party. Happily the cab had already passed the street. "Too late, too late," Eleanor sighed. "I should have thought of it before. Only Delia was so anxious . . ." They were silent again, driving along the bright crowded street. For though the shops were shut, they were still lit up and there were queues forming up at the doors of picture palaces.

"It's the sense of the family," Peggy said to herself, continuing the story of Eleanor that she was telling her friend at the hospital. "They all have it." Seen through his eyes this party was like some ancient monument, grass-grown, scored with half-worn-out inscriptions. It was a way of getting some fun out of it—to decipher these inscriptions; to describe it to him.

"When my Aunt Delia comes to town," she went on, "she says, 'We must have a party.' Then they all flock together—they love it."

She glanced at Eleanor again as if to collect another little fact about her. She was looking out of the window.

"How gay this all is," she said, pointing to the lighted shops. "What pretty clothes people wear nowadays!" She paused. "And the experiment with the guinea pig—how did that come off?" she asked. Peggy was puzzled. "What experiment?" she began. Then she remembered and told her.

"I see. So it proved nothing. So you've got to begin all over again. That's very interesting. Now explain to me once more. . . ."

Peggy explained to her once more about the guinea-pig.

The things she wants explained, she said to her friend at the hospital, are either as simple as two and two makes four; or so difficult that nobody in the whole world could answer them. And if you say to her "What's eight times eight?—" She smiled at the profile of her aunt against the window. She wanted to say to her, "Eleanor, what's eight times eight?" and then to see how she would put her hand to her forehead and look puzzled. But that was impossible.

"No: I dare say they wouldn't like turning out at this hour of night," Eleanor said. She had skipped back to Renny and Maggie, it seemed.

"Only it's a way of seeing people one wouldn't see, and now that we're all getting on—not you, us—one doesn't like to miss chances." The words were not the right ones for some reason: Peggy could not use them in her description. It was another proof of her clumsiness about people.

"I'm no good at describing people," she apologised to her friend at the hospital. Some of the things Eleanor said were "like her," but this was not "like her." She had become for some reason illimitable: alive. "She's not that—she's not that at all," Peggy said to herself, making a little dash with her hand as if to rub out an

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her.

"The bells don't ring and the taps don't run," said North. He felt very shy. "Or they don't stop running," he added, for the bath water was still gurgling in the pipes.

"And why are you in evening dress?" said Sara.

She had got up too.

"And why has Renny been crying?" she added. North looked at him. It was queer—there were wet marks on either side of his nose.

"Because we've been to a very bad play," said Maggie.

"And should like something to drink," said Renny.

Sara went to the cupboard and began clinking the glasses together.

"A bad play was it?" said North, turning to Maggie.

"Yes. We enjoyed it immensely," she said.

She looked round her as if to find a chair. Her eyes blinked a little as though she had been in darkness. The light was odd, falling through a cone of twisted paper. It made all their faces full of shadows and prominences.

"Were you reading?" said Renny, looking at the book which lay open on the table. "A play?" he added, glancing at it.

"We were on a rocky island in the middle of the sea," said Sara, putting the glasses on the table.

"Drink?" she asked with her hand on the syphon.

"Not for me," said Maggie.

"For me," said Renny.

Maggie looked at them standing in a ring round the table, silent, with the absorbed expressions of people who are pouring out drink. The mottled light made their faces look greenish. The two grooves on each side of Renny's nose were still wet. His face was all peaks and hollows, whereas North's face was round, snub-nosed and rather bluish about the lips. She had not seen him since he came back. His face interested her, as he watched his glass being filled. His flesh, laid smoothly over the bone, was blue, purple—but the light was queer. The twisted cone of paper was oddly stained. . . .

"Stop!" cried Renny, "Stop!" Sara had spirted the soda-water over the table. After his tears he was irritable. North took his glass.

"When did you get back?" Maggie asked him.

"About a week ago," he said, looking at her.

"You've sold your farm?" said Renny. He sat down and took his glass in his hand.

"Yes. Sold it," he said. "Whether I shall stay here, or go back," he said, taking his glass and raising it to his lips, "I don't know." Maggie looked at him. His face remodelled itself. The weights seemed to fall into different sockets as he spoke.

"Where was your farm?" said Renny, bending towards him. The lines in his face changed too, as if a twitch had been given to some fine network under the skin. Maggie gave her chair a little push so that she got the two heads in relation side by side. They were talking about Africa. But there was something about the light that puzzled her. She looked round. A lamp must be flaring in the street outside. Its light, flickering up and down, mixed with the electric light under its greenish cone of twisted paper. And behind them on the table was a dish of fruit. The heavy, sensual apples lay there side by side with the yellow-spotted bananas. And behind their heads rose the curve of the mahogany chair-back. And behind the curve of the chair-back

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rose three straight rods, ending in soft yellow plumes. The straight rods cut against the edge of the mantelpiece on which was a crinkled glass with a red lip. And then there were little black-and-white squares along the ledge. She ran her eye from thing to thing, gathering them together, going in and out of the grotesque crinkles, the swollen hollows, until . . . a hook dangled a voice spoke.

"To Africa?." she said, starting and looking round.

North stared at her.

"To Delia's party," he said. He had asked if she were coming.

A bell from some church in the neighbourhood began tolling. One, two, three, four . . .

"We must," said Renny. "We must." He rose.

"We promised Eleanor," he said. He looked like somebody commanding a troop, North thought, as he stood there at the table holding his glass of whiskey. The emphasis with which he spoke was out of all proportion to the occasion.

"But why?" Maggie began, stretching her arms out, as if she implored him to release her from some bond, some necessity—again the emphasis was out of all proportion to the occasion.

"Because," said Sara, suddenly rising from her chair and imitating the tone in which Renny had spoken, but exaggerating it, "we must, we must."

She spun round on her toe and balanced herself against the back of a chair.

"Go, go," said North, fearing that she was going to perch on the edge and begin again to swing her foot up and down.

"Shall I or shan't I, shall I or——" she was beginning, when Renny took her by the shoulders and pushed her out of the room.

"Have you got a car?" said Maggie, turning to North.

"Yes," said North. "It's outside."

"The four-seater we saw?" said Renny.

"I've only hired it," said North. "The brakes don't work."

"Can you take us round in it then?" said Maggie.

"If you'll trust me," said North. There was a pause. They heard Sara opening and shutting the drawers in her bedroom. The door opened a chink.

"What are you saying?" she called out.

"Nothing of any interest," said Maggie.

"D'you like novels?" said North, taking a book off the table.

"Hate them," said Maggie, taking the stout volume from him and holding it upside down.

" 'The Queen of England asked me to tea,' " Sara hummed as she came into the room holding stockings in her hand. " 'And which shall it be? The rose or the gold? for all are in holes, my stockings,' said she."

She laid them on the floor at Maggie's feet.

"That's what I mean," said Maggie, taking the stockings on her knee, "—you can sit at home as you like; you can say what you like," she continued, laying one stocking beside another, "but at parties"—she threw a pair at her sister: "Wear those!" she said—"but at parties," she went on, "people say, either it's

patched, or it's not matched. And then at parties"—she rolled up the other stockings in a ball—"they say, 'How's Renny. . . . How's Hugh?' "

"That's true," said Sara, pulling on one stocking. "But we must go," she said. "We must." She stressed Renny's words as she pulled her stocking on. "He's right, you know," she added, "because I had a vision, years ago, walking through the streets of London——"

"Put on your stockings," said Renny. He stood looking down at her.

"—of pyjamas hanging in a line," she said, looking up at him. "There were heads in the foreground," she added, pulling up the other stocking. "and I said to myself, Whose heads are those? A sigh answered me. We are those to whom the sorrows of the world——" She stopped.

"Is that Shelley, or is it Keats?" said North, taking up his hat.

"What's it matter," said Maggie, going to the glass and beginning to tidy her hair, "who writes, who writes," she paused, smoothing her hair back, "what?"

She stood there looking at herself in the glass.

Some beauty, North thought, watching her reflection, withers; some, he thought, grows more beautiful. But why, he asked, watching her, purse your lips up when you look in the glass?

"I'm going," said Renny. He walked to the door. "Get your cloak," he said to Sara. She went and fetched it; then she paused.

"But what else do I want?" she said, looking round her. "Pencil and paper—paper and pencil," she murmured, shuffling among the litter on the writing-table. "A sheet of paper white and fair," she hummed, throwing aside one sheet after another, "—that's the water rate; that's the washing bill—to make a garland for my hair——"

"We're going," said Renny. North followed him. They left the room.

"Here it is!" said Sara, snatching up a sheet of paper. "Put out the light, Maggie!" she called back, and ran downstairs after them.

on the window.

"There's somebody tapping," said Renny.

"Wait a moment," said Maggie. "Let him finish." She wanted North to describe Africa. But he was silent. There it was in front of him. But it was difficult to describe a place to people who had not seen it.

"You must go there and see it for yourself," he said. He could see it; but how could he break off a fragment, how could he sum it up, here, now, for them? "The colour——" he began. A cab was going slowly round the square; they could hear the purr of its wheels and the trees swishing in the air behind them. "The silence——" he added. He paused. A cat slunk past on the opposite side of the road. They saw its luminous green eyes for a moment. It quickened its pace as it entered the lighted strip on the pavement and vanished in the darkness.

He threw away his cigar.

"There's somebody at the window," he said. For a figure was still standing there. He threw his cigar into the bushes behind him, and they moved across the road.

They went in and took their coats off. Since they were so late, the room was already being made ready for supper. Little tables had been pulled forward and laid with cloths. Cloaks and hats, wraps and veils had all been bundled away onto a table at the back. There were furs, brocades, overcoats with newspapers sticking out of the pockets. Then they went upstairs, past the open doors of offices, past long windows that opened onto the back gardens that lay behind the houses. Trees in full leaf stretched their branches across at different levels; and the leaves, speckled here with bright-green light, there dark in shadow, moved up and down, since a little breeze was blowing. Then they came to the private part of the house where a strip of red carpet was laid. A roar of voices sounded behind the door.

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since I'm so old. What? Seventy-three? seventy-four? She looked back; and there the years were, lying, year after year, year blending into year, behind her; till they met here, in this room at this moment. Here we all are, she thought, looking round her. She caught sight of Morris; then of Rose; and there was Edward, with his head thrown back, talking to a man she did not know. Each of us has a strip of life lying behind us, she thought, watching Edward as he talked. But it's vanishing; it's going, she thought. I'm the only person in this room who remembers that night when he sat on the edge of my bed. . . . It's vanishing, it's going, she thought. Edward crying; the snow falling; the four-wheeler turning the corner; the yellow omnibus trotting along the Bayswater Road, and I thought to myself, she smiled, "I'm the youngest person in this bus." Now I'm the oldest.

She clenched her hands, and felt the hard little coins that she was holding.

"My life——" she said aloud, though half to herself.

"Yes?" said Sara, looking up.

Eleanor stopped. She had forgotten her. But there was somebody listening. Then she must put her thoughts into order; then she must find words. She was silent. "Isn't that William Whatney?" she said aloud, as a stout, almost hairless old man appeared in the doorway.

"I think it must be," she added. "But he's grown so white—so old——" She looked at him, where he stood pausing in the doorway.

"Where?" said Sara. But she looked in the wrong direction.

"No, No," said Eleanor. No, I can't tell anyone, she thought, leaning back in her chair. It's useless. But I seem to have done this before, she thought. It was the music, perhaps. She was sitting at a table in a restaurant and there was a flower on the table. And I remember taking up my fork, she said to herself—"Is this what they call a fox-trot, Sally?" she said aloud. Sara made no answer. The tune dragged itself in and out, sentimentally, slowly, as if it enjoyed its own anguish. And there were beads on the lampshade, Eleanor thought again. And a weight on my head. Also it had something to do with Nicholas. Either I'd been lunching with him or dining with him, she thought, and there was a parrot with a pink feather in a cage. . . .

But then, where did Kitty come in? she said to herself. Kitty breaking off a flower and giving it her? . . . She gave it up—so many details were dropped, or had got into the wrong places. And then they say, she thought, looking down at the parting on Sara's head, "We've been talking about you!"

"You didn't play up," she said.

"And you——" he began. But Eleanor gave a sudden jerk.

"Dear me . . ." she said. She half woke. She looked round her. "Milly and Hugh? Aren't they here? Where have they gone?" she asked.

She glanced about her in bewilderment. Since her last recollection, and it seemed only one second ago, was of Milly talking about candles in church, something must have happened. But they were gone. There must have been a gap.

"Was I asleep?" she asked.

"Asleep and snoring," North laughed. She shut her eyes again; but only for a second. Yes, she thought, I always snub her, poor Milly. Always would follow me about like a little dog, poor Milly. . . . There she was talking to a stout couple by the fireplace. Her eyes shut again. Relieved of some encumbrance, she felt that she would resign herself once more to the seductive world, the swift, the elongated world, in which a clergyman called Phipps—she snored—had candles with lolling yellow flames—her head pitched forward.

"She's off," North whispered. They looked at her. Sleep, now that she slept deeply, had given her dignity. Now she looked peaceful, far from them, rapt in the calm which sometimes gives the sleeper the look of the dead. They sat silent for a moment.

"Why—why—why——" he said at last, making a gesture as if he were plucking tufts of grass from the floor.

"Why what?" Maggie asked.

"The Gibbses," he said. She turned her head and looked at them.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

He could not hear what they were saying, but from their attitude he knew that they were still saying, My boy—My girl.

"Children," he said aloud.

She began counting: Milly had eight, she remembered.

"Jimmy; Lily; Hilda; Tom——" She stopped. "Violet; Christopher——" she began again.

"But when your baby was born," he interrupted her, "when I saw you with your baby, tears ran down my cheeks, Maggie; tears down my cheeks—as I walked up Victoria Street——"

She did not answer. He looked at her hands; they were strong hands; fine hands. But it would be one rip down the belly, he thought; or teeth in the soft fur of the throat. He looked up. Couples came dancing slowly past them. A girl stopped; and her gesture, as she moved her hands to touch a flower on her breast, had the seriousness of the very young anticipating life, which touched him.

"Why," he jerked his thumb in the direction of the lovely girl, "why, when she's so lovely——" he began.

"Am I so hideous?" said Maggie. "Motherhood, you mean," she added. "Yes," she asked, "why?"

She refused then to excuse herself. It seemed to him, as he looked at her, acknowledging the possessiveness of her own maternity, that she refused to help him. Yet, disagreeable as it was to him to remove her from an eminence in which she took the weight off his own shoulders and gave him what he longed for, it was better so perhaps, he thought; simpler, more humane

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perhaps; for even if—but she interrupted him.

"Going to stay with them?" she asked, nodding at the Gibbses.

"For cubbing in September," he replied.

"I remember," she said. "The Towers. A drawing-room; water colours; a decayed female," she went on, turning to him as if she wanted him to confirm her memory, "and a chocolate cake?"

"And horns," he added, "hanging at intervals on the staircase; stags; buffaloes; wild boars."

She raised the receiver. No one answered for a moment. She thought how Eleanor had sat there, in the same position; and had seen North talking to Sara with a smudge on her face. One of these days you'll be able to see the other person at the end of the telephone, she thought. But will one be able to see the picture that the other person's seen before one?

"Number, please," said the invisible voice. She gave the number: then she waited. She saw her own finger-nails holding the receiver.

Efficient, shell-like, polished but not painted, they're a compromise, she thought, between science (she was a doctor) and fashion; they're neither one thing nor the other, she thought: but then, red nails would scarcely——

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her hand.

"Come and talk to us, Renny," she called out.

"Good-evening," he said, coming up.

"You'll agree with me, Renny——" she began.

"Depends what you're saying, Eleanor," he said, sitting down on the other side of her. Again she could not remember. She paused.

"He used to take us to the Zoo," Maggie was saying. She was talking to North. "He used to give us rides on the elephant." She smiled at her brother. She waved at him with the sheet of paper she was holding in her hand.

"We don't want North to go back to that horrid farm; we want him to stay with us," Eleanor explained, looking at the sheet of paper.

"But do you think we are happier?" Peggy asked, looking at Renny across Eleanor's knees. He held his hands up.

"Maggie went for a ride on an elephant; so North mustn't go back to his farm, because we are happier——"

"It sounds like a game," Eleanor laughed. "He said, she said, and the consequences were—— But what we meant was——"

"Let's play a game," said Maggie, smoothing the paper on her knee.

"No, no," Eleanor protested. "Please don't play games. I've no head for games. And I want to talk to Renny—I never see Renny," she added, "Renny, whom I love." She turned and patted him on the shoulder.

She's rather above herself tonight, Peggy thought, looking up at her. Her eyes were bright; her cheeks were flushed—or was it only the tan after her voyage to India? "You look like a girl of eighteen, Nell!" she exclaimed.

"And I feel like one!" she said. "I feel as if I'd been in another world . . ." she said, thinking of her feeling of happiness, on the cliff, with her hair blown back.

"Tosh, Eleanor, tosh," said Renny.

I thought he'd say that, Peggy said to herself with some satisfaction, looking at him, side-face, as he sat on the other side of her aunt's knees. Still, she added, why not let Eleanor have her little flutter if she enjoys it?

"Tosh? what d'you mean by tosh?" Eleanor was asking. She leant forward; she held her hand out, as if she wished to hold up the whole traffic in order to let Renny speak.

"Always talking of the other world," he said, looking up at her—and he's very handsome certainly, Peggy thought. "Why not this one?" he said.

"But I meant this world," she said. "I meant happy in this world with living people."

Peggy edged back so that she got the support of the wall behind her. Happy in this world with living people! she thought. What nonsense, what nonsense, she thought. Happy in this world—in a world that is bursting with misery, she thought. Look at them, she said to herself; there's cruelty, there's pettiness, there's meanness enough . . . she was looking at a couple who had stepped in front of her. The usual couple, she thought; the usual mopping, mowing, flirting young man and woman. And apathy, she thought; passivity, she thought—she glanced at the Gibbses—which is worse. Let alone inanity, she added, listening. . . . "I don't know how it is," she caught the words as a little

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old woman passed her," but the heat doesn't affect me now as much as it used to——"

And round and round they go, she thought, watching the couples for a moment as they circled past, dancing, to this cheap tune.

But the music had stopped. The couples broke apart; they began to seize chairs, or to push their way through the door. Nicholas and Sara came to a standstill in front of them, swaying slightly as if they were giddy.

"Good-evening, Peggy; good-evening, Magdalena" said Nicholas, bowing profoundly over Maggie's hand.

"A thousand thanks for the pleasure, Donna Sara," he said, waving his hand as if she were a great Spanish lady whom he was conducting to her seat. There ought to be a red chair with a carved back to do justice to that flourish, Peggy thought sarcastically. But there was no chair for her to sit on. She sank down, all of a heap, on the floor. They were panting, Peggy noticed; they were full of exaggerated gestures and phrases because they were excited.

"Round and round and round," Sara panted. "Dum, dum, dum, dum——" She was so much out of breath that she could not get her words out. There she sat, panting. But what was there to be excited about, Peggy wondered. She was flushed and untidy. There was something wrong too with her clothes. Was it her stockings? Her hair? Anyhow she's enjoying herself, she thought with a sharp pang of envy. But then one must be a fool to enjoy this kind of thing, she added.

There was a pause. The young man who had been putting records on the gramophone walked off. They were not going to dance any more apparently. There was a break in the party. They were going to talk. They were going to eat perhaps. They were going to stream out into the back garden, she supposed, and sit on hard sooty chairs. From her place on the floor she had a queer view of people's feet; patent leather pumps; satin shoes; silk socks; coloured skirts. And the voices went on over her head. Odd little gusts of inconsecutive conversations reached her as people went past. Down in Norfolk where my brother-in-law has a boat. . . . Oh, a complete wash-out—yes, I agree. . . . Second-class is all right. . . . This is talk she thought. Nonsense if you listen to it. She listened. There was a lull in the talk. Far away she heard the sounds of the London night; a horn hooted; a siren wailed on the river. The remoteness of these sounds; the suggestion they brought in of other worlds indifferent to this world, intent upon their own sorrows and labours—but why do I notice everything? she thought. She shifted her position. I will not let myself think about the wife of the unemployed—what did he say he was—boilers riveter? What is a boilers riveter? she wondered. She saw again the small poor room with its pretentious ornaments. If they do have money, that's how they spend it, she thought; on thick lace curtains. She shifted her position. She did not wish to think; she wished that there were blinds, like those in railway carriages, that came down over the light and hooded the mind. The blue blind one pulls down on a night journey, she thought. She would force her mind to become a blank; she would lie back and accept, tolerantly, good-naturedly, whatever came. Scraps reached her from above. Eleanor was talking. Where was

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North to live. In a flat in Highgate . . . Uncle Digby . . . your mother . . . put flowers in a milk-jug . . . yes, Crosby's still alive. . . It was family gossip; little disjointed scraps; of no sort of interest. But Eleanor had said Enjoy yourself! How did people, she wondered, enjoy this kind of thing? Now they were laughing. Eleanor was saying . . . "met him on the river in a boat years ago." Why did that make them laugh? Because they saw a scene? She tried to see what they were seeing

There was the river; there was the boat; Eleanor presumably was wearing a sweeping skirt; perhaps there was a willow. . . . But it was no good; to see separately was not to see a picture, and she saw separately. She was tired. The skin round her eyes felt taut; a hoop was bound tight over her head; she had not got to sleep till half-past three, and Eleanor meant to stay to the end. She leant back and half shut her eyes, so that the tightness slackened. She tried to think herself away, into the open air, into the darkness of the country. There was a hedge; an owl came flying down the hedge. But he had a mouse in his claws, she said to herself, seeing a little black dot. She listened again. Again they were laughing. She felt vaguely that they were laughing at her. North says doctors are humbugs; health's not an end in itself, she thought. But what right have they to laugh? She opened her eyes, exacerbated by their laughter.

There was Renny, laughing. He held a sheet of paper in his hand; his head was flung back; his mouth was wide-open; and a sound came out of it like Ha! ha! ha! That is laughter, she said, observing him. Laughter . . .

They were all laughing. Her muscles began to twitch involuntarily. Renny gave her the paper. They had been playing a game. Each of them had drawn a different part of a figure. There was a woman's head on top, with a fuzz of curls like Queen Alexandra; but she had a long-bird's neck; then there was the body of a tiger; and the tiger ended in elephant's legs, dressed in child's drawers.

"I drew that—I drew that!" said Renny, pointing to the legs from which a long trail of ribbon depended. "Lady Cynthia looking lovely!" Sara cried.

"Now we must invent something for her to say," said North, taking the paper. "I am Cynthia, I am she . . ." he began, drawing a balloon from her mouth.

Again they all laughed. She laughed too. She could not help herself.

"But look here . . ." she said. She wanted to say something but she could not prevent herself from laughing. She was seized with laughter. She took the picture and looked at it. It was the legs that were so funny, with the ribbon trailing; in connection with the Queen's head.

"Listen . . ." she began again.

But nobody listened.

"No adjectives, North; no adjectives," Sara was saying.

"There's Shakespeare you know . . . A great poet, Shakespeare; but he never used . . ." Here Renny pointed to another part of the monster's body. "The face that launched a thousand ships," he said.

They all laughed again.

Peggy felt again that they were laughing not at her, but at something that she suddenly felt to be serious.

"Look here—I'm a doctor; I earn my living," she began again. She wanted to express something that seemed to her very important.

"I'm a doctor," she repeated.

Eleanor stopped laughing.

"Yes, Peggy?" she said. "Peggy wants to say something," she added. The others were silent. But they had stopped talking at the wrong moment. She had nothing ready; her words came in the wrong order.

"I spent last night bringing a baby into the world," she said. That was not what she had meant to say; but she must seize her opportunity.

She paused. North looked at her with some surprise.

"Here you're all talking about North," she began again. "How he's to live; where he's to live. What's the point of saying that sort of thing?"

She looked at her brother. A feeling of animosity possessed her. He was still laughing; but his face gradually smoothed itself out. He crinkled up his brown eyes. There was a bond between them; of antipathy and sympathy; she felt it more strongly in company.

"What's the use?" she said, turning to him. "You'll marry. You'll have children. What'll you do then? Make money. Write little books to make money. That's what we all do—make money."

She had got it wrong. She had meant to say something different; but she had got it wrong. They were not serious; and she was serious. But it was done now; they were listening and she must flounder on.

"That's what's wrong," she said. "Making money, making money," she repeated. Her eyes fixed themselves upon North, yet she did not mean him; yet she could not help fixing her eyes on him. She meant something impersonal and she was being personal. "You'll write one little book and then another little book," she said viciously, "instead of living—living differently." She dropped back with a jerk. She had failed. It was an incoherent jumble. She had broken off only a little fragment of what she meant to say. But her heart thumped; she felt relieved and stretched, as if she had been for a gallop over the downs. There it hung before her, the thing she had not said. But she had tried to say it.

She waited for them to attack her. She hoped they would attack her. But nobody spoke. Nobody even laughed. They don't think me worth attacking, she thought; they ignore me. Well anyhow I saw it, she said to herself as she leant back against the wall, and again she saw the owl, going up and down the field, up and down, so regularly, she said to herself, that you can time him.

Then Eleanor interrupted. "But that's just what I was thinking," she said. "Just what I was saying, Peggy," she said, bending down. "Ordinary people, ordinary people like ourselves——" she began.

And she's not laughing at me! Peggy thought. The tears came to her eyes. "Go on, Eleanor: go on," she said.

But Eleanor stopped. Two feet, squeezed, Peggy could not help noticing, into a brand new pair of pumps so that the bunions were outlined, had stopped in front of her. She looked up. It was old Patrick. There he stood in front of them, dangling his hands, executing a few steps of his little ursine dance.

"My dear friends," he began in his charming Irish

on the floor with her feet stretched out in front of her, smiled up at her and waved her away.

"No, no, no," she said, "I'm not coming. I'm not hungry. I'm not thirsty. I'm happy," she added.

Oh you fool, Peggy thought, looking down on her.

"One stocking's blue," she said, pointing.

"And what about the Jew?" said North, stretching out his hand to pull her up.

"Yes, what am I to do?" she exclaimed, scrambling onto her feet and pirouetting round like some long-legged bird. "What about the Jew, what are you to do?" Eleanor repeated absentmindedly. She was still groping among the chair cushions. "I'm sorry to be such an old muddler," she apologised, "keeping everybody waiting——"

"Here they are," said Peggy, holding out her gloves.

"Thanks, Peggy, thanks," she said as she took them. Then she stopped short. An expression of surprise and pleasure came into her face.

"There's Kitty!" she broke off.

A very handsome elderly woman, with curled white hair and something shining in her hair, had just come in. She stood in the doorway looking about her. She was looking for her hostess, but her hostess was not there.

"Kitty!" Eleanor exclaimed. She went towards her. Lady Lasswade stood there smiling with a certain air of good-natured authority, as if she felt sure that somebody would come and greet her in a moment. She had only to wait.

She was right. Edward came across the room and spoke to her. Then Rose came. Then Eleanor sailed over in her red gold cloak and joined them. Peggy turned to speak to Maggie; but she had walked away. It was all broken up; it was all destroyed, she felt. Directly something got together, it broke. Yes, she thought, and then you have to pick up the pieces, and make something new, something different, she thought.

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The sort of thing she would say, he thought. He had a feeling of frustration. He wanted to talk to Maggie. But of course she had got caught up by somebody he did not know; and her beautiful, if foolishly weak, good manners, her gentle, but perhaps mocking way of responding to whoever it might be, had made her once more a victim—this time to an old man in a white waistcoat.

He examined the books in the bookcase. He took one out and held it upside-down. The door was completely blocked by the older generation, who stood there talking. Latin it was; a little drawing-room classic; purple passages cut out with a pair of scissors; not the sort of book he liked, he thought.

And could he still translate Latin? he wondered. *Nox est perpetua una dormienda*, he read. Note the long word at the end of the sentence, as old What's-his-name used to say. *Nox est perpetua una dormienda*—at least he could translate that, boor though he was. At least I can translate that, he thought, and note the long word at the end of—— But there was a movement. He put the book back in the bookcase. Old Patrick had

front of them.

"Well?" she demanded. "Why don't you go on? I like hearing speeches."

She stood in front of them, very upright, red-faced and military-looking.

"Silence!" she exclaimed. She took up a fork and knife and beat the butt end on the table. "Silence!" she rapped again.

"What's Rose making such a noise about?" said Martin, coming across the room. "—the very spit and image," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, "of our great Uncle—Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse!"

"Well, and I'm proud of it," she said, turning on him and looking him full in the face. "I'm proud of my family, proud of my country, proud of——"

"Your sex?" he interrupted her.

"And what about you?" she said, tapping him on the cheek. "Proud of yourself are you?"

"Don't quarrel, children, don't quarrel!" Eleanor cried, edging her chair rather nearer. "They always would quarrel," she said. "Always . . . always."

"Rose was such a horrid little spitfire," said Martin. He squatted down on the floor. "With her hair scraped off her forehead . . ." He looked up at her.

"—and wearing a pink frock," Rose added. She sat down abruptly on a chair that seemed to be too small for her. "A pink frock; a pink frock," she repeated, as if the words recalled something.

Nicholas waved his hand with a gesture of despair. "I want to make a speech," he said, "and they will talk about pink frocks!"

". . . in the drawing-room at Abercorn Terrace, when we were children," said Rose. "D'you remember?" She looked at Martin.

Delia, going round with a great jug of claret cup filling a glass here and there, stopped in front of them. Nicholas held out his hand to her.

"Abercorn Terrace!" she repeated, filling his glass. She flung her head back and looked for a moment astonishingly young, handsome and defiant. "Abercorn Terrace! . . . It was hell!" she said suddenly. She had dropped her Irish manner.

"Oh, come, Delia——" Martin protested, holding out his glass to be filled.

"It was hell!" she repeated, pouring out the claret cup. "D'you know," she said, "when I go to Paddington, I always say to the taxi-man, 'Go the other way round!' "

"That's enough . . ." Martin stopped her as she filled his glass. "I hated it too . . ." he began.

"What's Martin hating now?" said Lady Lasswade, coming up to them. She held her glass in front of her as though it were a bauble. A chair was pushed up behind her.

"You always were a hater," she said, sitting down. "Well, it's bad for the rheumatism but still . . ." she held out her glass to be filled. "What was it you hated that night, Martin, when you dined with us? I remember how angry you made me. . . ." She smiled at him. He had grown almost cherubic; pink—plump, with his hair brushed up like a waiter's.

"Hated? I never hated anybody," he protested. "My heart's full of love; my heart's full of kindness," he said, smiling at her.

"Nonsense," said Kitty. "When you were young you hated—everything." She flung her hand out.

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"My house—my friends . . ." She broke off with a quick little sigh.

Nicholas thumped on the table again.

"And I dare say I'm better off as I am," she added, half to herself, "with just a boy to chop up wood."

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen . . ." Nicholas began again. But there was a babble of voices.

"Going to make a speech, is he?" said Kitty, turning to Edward, who had dragged his chair up beside her. "Why don't you make a speech, Edward?" she asked.

"The only place where oratory is still practised as an art," said Edward, "is the Church."

Yes, North thought, looking at him, you're a priest, and I don't like priests.

That's why I didn't marry you, thought Kitty, catching the familiar whiff of what she still called privately "Oxford."

But Nicholas had now risen to his feet. He took a deep breath which expanded his shirt-front. He fumbled with his fob.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began again, "in the name of all who have enjoyed themselves tonight——"

"Speak up! Speak up!" some young men cried who were standing in the window.

("Is he a foreigner?" Kitty whispered to Eleanor.)

". . . in the name of all who have enjoyed themselves tonight," he repeated rather more loudly, "I wish to thank our host and hostess——"

"Oh for goodness' sake don't thank me!" said Delia, brushing past them with her empty jug.

Again the speech was brought to the ground. He must be a foreigner, Kitty thought to herself, because he has no self-consciousness. There he stood, holding his wine-glass and smiling.

"Go on, go on," she urged him. "Don't mind them." She was in the mood for a speech. A speech was a good thing at parties. It gave a fillip. It gave a finish. She tapped her glass on the table.

"It's very nice of you," said Delia, trying to push past him, "but don't thank me."

"But, Delia, it is not what *you* want; it is what *we* want," he expostulated, laying his hand on her arm. "And it is fitting, when our hearts are full of gratitude . . ."

Now he's getting into his stride, Kitty thought; I dare say he's a bit of an orator; most foreigners are.

". . . when our hearts are full of gratitude," he repeated, spreading out his fingers.

"What for?" said a voice abruptly.

Nicholas stopped again.

"Who is that dark man?" Kitty whispered to Eleanor. "I've been wondering all the evening."

"Renny . . ." said Eleanor. "Renny," she repeated.

"What for?" said Nicholas. "Wait. That is what I am going to tell you." He paused and drew a deep breath which again expanded his waistcoat. But a head popped up over the edge of the table; a hand seized a handful of petals.

"Red Rose, thorny Rose, wild Rose, tawny Rose!" a voice cried, and the petals were thrown, fan-shape, over the stout old woman who was sitting on the edge of her chair. She looked up as they fell in her lap, and brushed them off the prominences of her person. "Thank you!" she said. "Thank you!" She took up a flower and beat it energetically on the edge of the

table. "But I want my speech!" she said.

("Who's that pops her head up like a jack-in-the-box?" Kitty whispered to Eleanor.)

Martin interrupted.

"A fine fellow, Rose," he said. "Pargiter of Pargiter's Horse—I drink to her!"

He drank. He put his glass down with a thump on the table.

"Oh, if you're all drinking healths," said Kitty, "I'll drink too. Rose, your health! Rose is a fine fellow," she said, raising her glass. "But Rose was wrong," she added. "Force is always wrong—don't you agree with me, Edward?" She tapped him on the knee. "Ah, there was the War," she added in an undertone. . . . "Still, Rose had the courage of her convictions. I drink to Rose." She drank.

"The same to you, Kitty," said Rose, bowing to her.

"She smashed his window," said Martin, "and then she helped him to smash other people's windows. Where's your decoration, Rose?"

"In a cardboard box on the mantelpiece," said Rose. "You can't get a rise out of me at this time o' day, my dear boy."

"But I wish you'd let Nicholas finish his speech," said Eleanor.

He was sitting down, gazing benevolently in front of him. "What's the good?" he said. "Nobody wants to listen."

Down through the ceiling, muted and far away, came the preliminary notes of another dance. The young people hastily swallowing what remained in their glasses, put them down on the floor and began to move off upstairs.

Soon, through the floors of the house, there was the sound of feet thudding, rhythmically, heavily.

"Another dance," said Eleanor. They sat still. "When I was young," she said, listening—the sound still stirred some memory in her—"I used to dance. But now——"

"The rheumatics!" said Kitty. "Aren't we going to have our speech after all?" She looked at Nicholas; she did not know his name. "Mr——?"

"No," he said. "No speeches. No speeches!"

"But I want a speech," said Kitty in her authoritative way.

"There's Peggy," said Eleanor, catching sight of her where she stood eating a ham sandwich. "Come, Peggy. Come and make a speech."

She was looking very pretty and gay.

"Come and speak for the younger generation," said Kitty.

"But I'm not the younger generation," said Peggy, joining them. "And I've made my speech already," she added, sinking down onto the floor at her aunt's feet.

North made room for her beside him.

"I made a fool of myself upstairs," she said, looking at him.

"You told us how you despised us all," he said. She had lost her grim look; there was colour in her eyes. She was extremely pretty, he thought.

"I didn't say anything of the kind," she protested.

"But you meant it," he said. "And it's true," he added.

"What's true?" she asked him.

and Eleanor. The three women standing there in their evening clothes in the daylight wore a statuesque look; with their heads turned away, and the folds of their silver, black and gold dresses falling stiffly, they looked as if they were carved in stone.

"There," Maggie whispered to her sister. Kitty turned round.

"Don't look at me!" she exclaimed. "I must look a perfect fright!" She put her hands in front of her face for a moment. Then she dropped them. "Can't I give you a lift back, Nell?" she said, turning. "I've a car waiting."

But Eleanor was looking at the curtained houses across the square. She did not answer. The blinds were drawn. There was a spot of gold here and there on the glass. Everything looked clean-swept, fresh and virginal. The pigeons were shuffling in the tree-tops.

"I've a car . . ." Kitty repeated.

"Listen," said Eleanor, raising her hand.

"That's wood pigeons, isn't it?" said Kitty. She put her head on one side to listen. The sound of pigeons cooing could be heard.

"Wood pigeons?" said Edward, coming up to her.

"There, on the tree-tops," said Kitty. The green-blue birds were shuffling about on the branches, crooning to themselves.

Morris joined them.

"What an hour for us old fogies to be out of bed!" he said, brushing his waistcoat. "I haven't seen the sun rise since—since——"

"Ah, but when we were young we thought nothing of making a night of it!" said old Patrick, clapping him on the shoulder. "I remember going to Covent Garden and buying roses for a certain lady . . ."

Delia smiled as if some romance of her own or another's had been recalled to her.

"And I remember . . ." Eleanor began. She stopped. Then it had been autumn; now it was summer. The sky was a faint blue; the roofs were tinged purple against the blue; the chimneys were a pure brick-red. An air of ethereal calm and simplicity lay over everything.

"And all the tubes have stopped; and all the omnibuses," she said, turning round. "How are we going to get home?"

"We can walk," said Rose. "Walking won't do us any harm."

"Not on a fine summer morning," said Martin.

A breeze went through the square. In the stillness they could hear the branches rustle as they rose slightly; the pigeons shifted and shuffled on the tree-tops.

"I'm so glad it's fine!" Delia exclaimed. "And it's been so good of you to come!" she added. She turned round. The dancers, the last of her guests, were coming into the room to get their things. "Thank you—thank you all for coming!" she exclaimed, throwing out her hands. "And look at Maggie's bunch!" she cried. "How beautifully you've arranged them!" she said, taking the flowers that Maggie held out. "Look, Eleanor . . ." she turned to her sister.

But Eleanor was standing with her back to them. She was watching a taxi that was gliding slowly round the square. It stopped in front of a house opposite.

"Aren't they lovely?" said Delia, holding out the flowers.

"That's our parson," Hugh explained.

"Quite a good chap in his way," he added with his chuckle.

"There I don't agree," said Milly. The name Phipps had some curious power over her. She spoke with an acerbity that made her become real. Not only she became real; but the village, the steeple, and the manor-house with its circle of old trees also appeared before North's eyes.

"Low Church is he?" he asked, waking up, "your Mr Phipps?"

"No, no," Hugh protested. "High. Very High. Candles—that sort of thing."

"And the villagers don't like it," put in Milly.

"Of course it's his wife. . . ."

speak but smiled, rather mockingly. She always made fun of Edward, North remembered; "Nigs," she called him. Of course he was vain; he had his little foibles; he liked being—now what on earth is he, he asked himself. Professor? Master? Perhaps a knight, after all these years. Still Arbuthnot, R.K., said he owed more to Edward than to any man. "He said he owed more to you than to any man," he said aloud.

Edward brushed aside the compliment. He had a way of putting his hand to his crest that North remembered. "And what are your plans?" said Edward. "But you deserve a holiday," he added with the same deference again, respecting the man of action.

"That's what I'd like to talk to you about," said North. He almost added "sir," as if he were speaking to his old headmaster.

"Yes," said Edward. "You must come and stay with me—when you've time."

of a wine-glass; the rim of a plate. The hands went on picking up flower after flower. That was a white rose; that was a yellow rose; that was a rose with violet valleys in its petals. Petals lay everywhere, like shallops, like boats on a river, he said to himself; and he was floating down a river. And there were faces too. The mouths opened and shut. But voices don't fit faces, he thought, half opening his eyes. That's the face of an Italian nobleman, he thought . . . that's the face of a wild animal, he thought. And now that hand, he thought, is taking up a purple mountain . . .

"But aren't we going to have a speech, North?" a voice interrupted him. He looked up with a start. Lady Lasswade was peering down on him.

"Maggie!" he exclaimed, pulling himself up.

"Speak!" he exclaimed. She must, she must, he thought, wishing once more to make her assume a responsibility that was too heavy for himself to bear. There she sat, gathering them together, the roses, the daisies . . .

"Yes, it's Maggie's turn to speak," said Nicholas, putting his hand on her knee.

"Speak up, speak up!" Renny laughed at her.

She sat looking at the bunch of flowers. She held it rather critically in front of her. "No," she said, laying aside one flower and taking up another. "No, no." She shook her head.

Their laughter ceased

~~They were silent~~. Feet thudded, dancing on the floor above. A siren hooted on the river. A van crashed down the street in the distance. There was a rush and quiver of sound; something seemed to be released; it was as if the life of the day ~~had begun again~~.

"And what was your speech going to have been about, Mr . . . I'm afraid I don't know your name?" said Kitty, turning towards Nicholas, " . . . the one that was interrupted?" she said.

"Yes, we must go," said Eleanor. She began looking for her things. She began ferreting in the cushions of the chair. Oh, if I could be like you! Peggy thought, looking up at her with a sudden access of affection. Again the tears came to her eyes. But it's absurd, she said to herself. It's because I'm tired. She looked down. Feet were passing. She saw them blurred through her tears. But what am I crying for, she asked herself. Because I'm happy? Because I'm unhappy? She did not know which it was. More feet stopped, and the hem of a black dress.

"Aren't you people coming down to supper?" said a chuckling little voice. She looked up. It was her Aunt Milly. And there was Hugh by her side.

"Supper's downstairs," said Hugh. "Supper's downstairs." And they passed on.

"How prosperous they've grown!" said North, looking after them.

"Ah, but they're so good to people . . ." Eleanor began. She was hunting for her bag or her pocket-handkerchief among the cushions of her chair. She always will make allowances, Peggy thought, for anyone who's connected with the family. She looked up at her; her eyes were clear now.

"Lost your coppers, Nell?" she said aloud.

"No, I've got my coppers," said Eleanor. "It's my bag. . . . Now where did I put it down?" she began.

She ferreted in her chair.

Here a little hen-like woman, who had been hovering on the outskirts, fluttered forward and touched Eleanor on the arm.

"Oh, Miriam!" she exclaimed, turning round to greet her. "I didn't know you were here!" They pecked each other's cheeks in a hurried way.

"But I've been here the whole evening! I was the very first to come!" said Miriam Parrish with a nervous laugh.

So that's old Miriam Parrish is it? Peggy thought. It was she who had made that remark about the heat not affecting her as much as it used to. A curious succession of pink bows all down her dress seemed to indicate that she had called in the help of the local dressmaker. It was a great occasion. She had been the first to come, in her new dress. There must be at least fifteen pink bows firmly attached at regular intervals.

What cheap pleasures we live for, Peggy thought, looking at the bows. Again she had a premonition of tears.

"And you don't remember me," said Miriam, taking her hand. "But I know you. You're Morris's daughter. I've heard so much about you—how wonderfully clever you are . . ."

"I shall burst into tears if you say any more," said Peggy, though taking her hand, "—or laughter." Which it would be she was not sure. She felt light headed; she felt slightly tipsy.

"Coming?" she said, stretching out a hand to Sara in order to conceal her emotion. But Sara, who was lying

"D'you mind if I move your chair against the wall, Nell?" she said.

"Not a bit—not a bit," said Eleanor.

She sat down.

"Come and sit by me," she said, looking up, "Sally, I haven't seen you for an age. Unless you want to dance too," she added.

"I?" said Sara, yawning. "No, I want to sleep." She sank down on a cushion beside Eleanor. She stretched herself out. Now one of the vases was upset, and a stream of water flowed across the carpet.

"Don't mind it, don't mind it—it doesn't matter at all!" Delia cried, assuming the manner of a harum-scarum Irish hostess. But North stooped and swabbed up the water.

"What are you going to do with that pocket-handkerchief?" Eleanor asked him. It was wringing wet.

"Hang it on a chair to dry," said North, walking off.

"Dining with you, wasn't he?" said Eleanor, looking down on the top of Sara's head. She had propped herself against the wall, for chairs in this part of the room had run out. Eleanor saw again the picture that she had seen at the end of the telephone.

"And what did you talk about—you and North?" she asked, seeing her sit on the edge of a chair, swinging her foot up and down.

"Talk about?" said Sara. "You, Eleanor," she said with a little yawn. She's dazed, Eleanor thought; it does make one feel dizzy, she added. People were passing them all the time; brushing against their knees, moving tables and chairs as they cleared the room for dancing.

"Me?" said Eleanor. "What about me?"

She looked round her. The music had struck up. Couples began to turn and twist slowly—how slowly, she thought, compared with the dances we used to dance. . . .

"Your life," said Sara.

"My life?" Eleanor repeated. That's odd, she thought. It was the second time that evening that somebody had talked about her life. And she hadn't got one, she felt—not at the moment. That's odd too, she thought, feeling for something that was not there,